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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001087

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: FALLUJAH: ARMY-POLICE FRICTION AND PERCEIVED U.S.
"MIXED MESSAGES"

Classified By: Robert S. Ford, Political Counselor,
reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Reports of recent Iraqi Army (IA) and Iraqi Police (IP) friction in Fallujah led to a Marine-initiated meeting held March 20 to convey Coalition Force (CF) concerns and implement operational changes. The Shia-dominant army units (two brigades) and Sunni-dominant city police force (1,300 at present, locally recruited) agreed to new procedures and improved liaison activity. For now, the intra-ISF tension has lessened, but army and police units in the still volatile and symbolic city will require continued close Marine oversight. Marine leaders made clear that officers will be held personally accountable for the actions of their forces. Fallujah's mayor, Sheikh Dhari Abdel Hady Al-Zobaie, also expressed frustration with U.S. "mixed messages." Fallujans remain concerned about perceived coalition policy to stand aside should sectarian violence worsen and extend beyond Baghdad. They argue that the Coalition is responsible for protecting Sunni Arabs against MOI-run militias, and have expressed mounting anxiety over a premature U.S. pullout. END SUMMARY.

ISF FRICTION: CONTAINED, FOR NOW

12. (C) Fallujan residents have regularly complained to Marines and Poloff about IA behavior and treatment, especially the army brigade stationed in the northern part of the city. Iraqi police, who number 1,300 at present and are locally recruited Sunni-Arabs, have voiced similar concerns. On March 14, IP complained that IA had blocked access to a street and were threatening to shoot them. On March 15, a man related to an IP approached the Joint Coordination Center with visible injuries; he said he had received them at an entry checkpoint from IA soldiers, but did not want to file a formal report (likely out of fear of IA retribution). On March 16, IA reportedly surrounded a city school because they claimed a grenade had been thrown at them in the area. IP arrived, exchanged words with the IA unit, but departed only after Marines requested it.

13. (C) Following these incidents, the Marine regiment (Fifth Marines) charged with overall security in Fallujah held a meeting with IA, IP and city leaders on March 20. The Marine commander made clear that all ISF leaders would be held personally accountable for the behavior of their soldiers and officers. IA-IP fights and friction would not be tolerated. Liaison capacity between units needed to improve and extend to lower ranks. Mayor Dhari, IA commanders, and the city police chief acknowledged the need to refocus efforts and cooperation.

(NOTE: Criticism of the IA is not uniform. Fallujans claim that the IA brigade operating in the northern half of the city acts more abusively to residents, whereas the brigade in the southern sector has functioned well. END NOTE.)

U.S. "MIXED MESSAGES"

¶4. (C) Sheikh Dhari conveyed privately to PolOff March 19 growing frustration with seemingly contradictory U.S. positions and public comments. He said such "mixed messages" were confusing Sunni-Arabs and would be counter-productive. Sheikh Dhari remarked, "there are so many messages coming from you Americans" to include, in his words:

--"General Casey tells us that security needs to be handed over to the ISF."

--"Rumsfeld said if you hand Iraq back to Iraqis it will be like the situation in Germany, and having Nazis come back."

--"Bush says there is democracy in Iraq."

--"Ambassador Khalilzad states that MOI and MOD will not be handed over to sectarianism."

--"And now you Americans say that you are meeting with the Iranians." (NOTE: Fallujah-area Sunnis fear "dirty deals" might be cut with Tehran and reflects ongoing paranoia about Iran's "hidden hands" in Iraq. END NOTE)

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¶5. (C) Sheikh Dhari also voiced concerns over what he considered to be an unclear U.S. position regarding increased sectarianism and CF reactions. Would U.S. military forces stand aside, as Secretary Rumsfeld implied in his recent Senate testimony? He added "we are in a dilemma and confusion. It is like Indian movies, which all start with happiness but end with dilemmas." Sheikh Dhari urged the U.S. to be more clear on these areas or risk exacerbating tension and Sunni-Arab fears that they will be left to fend for themselves against government-backed Shia militias should the situation deteriorate. PolOff reiterated the U.S.'s commitment to a national unity government and non-sectarian Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior, and added that Iraq's future would be decided by Iraqis, not Iranians -- or Americans for that matter.

MOI TORTURE BUNKER

¶6. (C) Mayor Dhari told PolOff that Sunni-Arabs seek clarity on the overall U.S. position on militias. Many Fallujans have echoed concerns to PolOff about the timing of any CF drawdown. Some also have pointed to the MOI-run Jadriyah torture bunker in Baghdad, and asked PolOff what follow-up the U.S. planned, if any. (Details of these exchanges will be reported septel.)

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Intra-ISF friction in Fallujah likely stems from increased sectarianism, particularly in Baghdad. The IA units have been stationed in the city since Operation Al Fajr. When MOI Public Order Brigade (POB) forces (since redeployed) operated in Fallujah -- from December 2004 to summer 2005 -- residents similarly flagged abuse

concerns, citing comments by POB members that it was "Shia time, Sunni boys." Active Marine oversight should help improve the dynamic and deter any escalation. Still, the IA-IP relationship remains a potential flashpoint. The MOI has recently agreed to increase, by 500, the number of police assigned to Fallujah and surrounding areas. The city police chief wants to recruit 200 of this group from the Shia-dominant Nasser Wa Salaam area (east of Fallujah). This plan could help ease tension, provided the plan is matched with sufficient oversight and leadership, or possibly exacerbate it should sectarian pressures country-wide escalate.

18. (C) Sheikh Dhari's criticisms of U.S. positions center on the sustained fear, verging on fixation, in Anbar of Iranian influence. This perception of Tehran's meddling is widely shared. The not unfounded anxiety over MOI militias will likewise continue to drive the unsettled Sunni-Arab mindset in Fallujah. One senior Fallujah Imam recently told PolOff that while the Shia and Kurds had their militias, the Badr Corp and Pesh Merga respectively, the Sunnis only had the resistance.

KHALILZAD